

VZCZCXRO9704
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #3559/01 3091024
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 051024Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2886
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003559

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EIND](#) [ELAB](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: ACCUSATIONS REGARDING CHILD SOLDIERS IN DEPARTMENT
OF LABOR REPORT

REF: STATE 92560

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Department of Labor (DOL) &2008 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor⁸ (reftel) incorrectly identifies Afghanistan as a country recruiting children into its armed forces. The report's introduction suggests that a central economic issue for Afghanistan is that the GIROA actively militarizes its youths. But this view seriously mischaracterizes both the source and depth of the country's economic situation, and the armed forces efforts in adopting careful vetting practices. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that insurgent recruitment of children is on the rise, to suggest that the GIROA is primarily at fault in this situation is misleading and does little to advance human rights. Post requests a retraction of this year's remarks and will work to change next year's DOL report to more accurately characterize Afghanistan's labor situation. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On September 10, 2009, the Department of Labor (DOL) released its &2008 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.⁸ Embassy Kabul is concerned by two sentences in the report's introduction. DOL cites Afghanistan twice regarding the recruitment of children into the armed forces: &In Afghanistan, there was increasing evidence of children being recruited into both state and non-state armed forces, though the prevalence of the occurrence was unclear⁸ (page xxiii). And: &Countries whose national armies continue to recruit children, such as the Central African Republic, Chad, and Afghanistan, have demonstrated a lack of commitment to address the most grievous forms of child labor⁸ (page xxxiv). These sentences contradict our human rights reporting on the subject of child soldiers, and present, we believe, a distorted picture of the situation in Afghanistan by suggesting that the GIROA militarizes its youth by recruiting youth into the armed forces. Further, raising concerns with GIROA about possible child soldiers may distract GIROA energy and attention from the more pressing issues of child labor, include child sexual exploitation.

¶3. (SBU) Child and forced labor in Afghanistan is a significant and dramatically obvious problem. Insufficient employment options for youth and the lack of sustainable income-generating activities for older men and women, who must rely on youth to assist in feeding and sheltering their families, are key problems. Economic conditions probably do compel underage boys and sometimes girls to seek work in the armed forces. But such a likelihood is distinct from the assertion that the armed forces recruit underage soldiers. (NOTE: Fewer than 10 percent of children are registered at birth; thus accurate birth age is typically difficult to prove. END NOTE.)

¶4. (U) Insurgent recruitment of underage soldiers is widely reported and, based on anecdotal evidence, appears to be on the rise. But national armed forces recruitment of children is much harder to substantiate; we have thus far been unable to verify the allegations of deliberate child recruitment by national forces.

¶5. (U) Though the DOL's rules permit them to use sources up to seven years old, we believe that sources from within two years do not support such assertions. Furthermore, the presence of child soldiers in Afghanistan is hardly comparable to countries with famously-egregious records of child soldiering. A recently-released RAND report titled &The Long March: Building An Afghan National Army,8 states "the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) confirmed that recruiting young soldiers to the ANA has not been a major problem" (page 15) despite the high numbers the ANA needs to meet their recruitment targets. Our POL-MIL office asserts that the ANA vetting procedures are reputable. Our ISAF office points out that CSTC-A, which trains armed forces, verifies both ANA and ANP recruiting and vetting procedures.

¶6. (SBU) Embassy Kabul welcomes DOL's efforts to monitor child labor and forced labor conditions in the countries and goods on the TVPRA List, but believes that this report mischaracterizes the economic and military situation in country by grouping Afghanistan with countries known for their active reliance on child soldiers.

¶7. (SBU) CSCT-A does due diligence to ensure ANA and ANP compliance with recruitment and vetting procedures, but given fundamental weaknesses in Afghan birth registry systems and the difficulty in verifying the age of recruits, Embassy Kabul cannot assert that no child soldier exists within the ANA or ANP. Embassy Kabul further acknowledges that there may be problems of which we are unaware with the recruiting and vetting practices for the relatively undefined civilian

KABUL 00003559 002 OF 002

militias. Militias sponsored by GIROA may not be as tightly monitored as the ANA and ANP.

¶8. (SBU) However, we are confident that the ANA and its subsets, including the Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC), and the ANP and its subsets including the Afghan Border Police, Customs Police, Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), Afghan National Civil Order of Police (ANCOP), Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), Counter-Narcotics Unit, Anti-Crime Unit, and the Afghan Police Protection Program (AP3) have robust recruiting and vetting practices in place against child soldiers.

¶9. (U) We do not agree with the DOL's assessment regarding GIROA recruitment of child soldiers. We recognize that the ANA, working in concert with CSTC-A, actively vets recruits and rejects underage applicants. Therefore:

¶A. We request and will work for a retraction of this year's DOL summary comments.

¶B. We will work to change next year's DOL report to more accurately characterize Afghanistan's labor situation.

EIKENBERRY